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Cover Page Footnote

Elizabeth Miller, Professor of English at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, gave this paper at the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts (Ft Lauderdale, FL) in 1999.

Coffin nails: Smokers and Non-smokers in *Dracula*

Elizabeth Miller

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When Jonathan Harker arrives at Castle Dracula, he is met by a most gracious host. In addition to providing the English solicitor with a fine meal complete with wine, a comfortable room and a warm fire, the Count offers his guest a cigar. This is in spite of the fact that he himself does not smoke. That Jonathan, the English solicitor, smokes while the Transylvanian vampire does not, is curious. That is, until one notices that all of the marginalized characters -- vampires, "vampires-in-waiting" (the women) and madmen -- abstain from tobacco. This paper will examine the presence and absence of smokers in the novel, and come to a few tentative conclusions.

The smoke of choice in *Dracula* is the cigar, though occasionally other forms (especially cigarettes and pipes) are mentioned. To be seen with a cigar in late Victorian England was "to lay claim to a certain status" (Kiernan 41), while the cigarette was more of a symbol of democracy and equality, "the common denominator of all ranks" (42). Women, of course, were not expected to smoke, and any smoking in their presence by gentlemen was considered a social crime. Stoker himself was a cigar smoker, as was his employer Henry Irving (*Reminiscences* 53, 142, 144). I doubt very much if the Beefsteak Room had a non-smoking section.

A good place to start is with Count Dracula. Even though he is a non-smoker, he keeps a supply of cigars on hand, an indication that he appreciates the importance of having the finest tobacco products available for potential guests. One wonders how he obtained them. Imported no doubt, as one would hardly expect the general store at nearby Bistritz to be well stocked in such niceties. Presumably, he expected his English visitor to be a smoker of quality. (Actually Harker is a last-minute replacement for Mr Hawkins, who came down with an attack of gout.) No doubt Dracula came across the popularity of the tobacco habit in one of the books "relating to England and English life" that graced his library at the Castle. It is curious that the Count does not take up smoking, as part of his plan to walk unnoticed through the streets of London. According to remarks he makes to Jonathan, he seems quite eager not to be recognized as a stranger in a strange land. As Harker notes in his Journal later when he and his friends are staking out Dracula's house at Piccadilly, they all "began smoking cigars so as to attract as little attention as possible" (410). By implication, not smoking would have attracted attention, something the Count wanted to avoid. But he remains a non-smoker, and we are denied the image of the vampire Count with a cigarette dangling between his fangs!

On closer investigation, there are logical explanations as to why the Count is a non-smoker. First, it has some basis in historical accuracy. After all, according to Van Helsing, the Count must have been "that voivode Dracula who won his name against the Turk" (337). Even though there is no evidence that Stoker knew that this voivode Dracula was the notorious Vlad the Impaler, he certainly was aware from his source (William Wilkinson) that the Draculas (there is some confusion in the source as to which was which) lived and ruled in the fifteenth century. Tobacco, which had its origins among the aboriginals of North America, was not introduced into Europe until after the discovery of America.

In Stoker's scheme, Dracula became a vampire as a result of dealings with the Devil at the "scholomance" -- and smoking was obviously not one of the vices he picked up at school. So presumably, he was smoke-free when he entered the vampiric state. Neither did he pick up the filthy habit during the centuries of his vampiric existence, even though by the seventeenth century, smoking had spread to Turkey and the Balkans. One could safely assume, I suppose, that vampires (as the un-dead) are non-breathers and even if they were to smoke, they would not inhale. I presume that is why Dracula is apparently not bothered by second-hand smoke, as he sits with Harker for hours while the latter is puffing away.

Furthermore, there exists at least in Romanian folklore a belief that smoke can be used as part of the weaponry against a vampire. Emily Gerard notes in "Transylvanian Superstitions" (though Stoker did not use this particular piece of lore): "To walk smoking round the grave on each anniversary of the death is also supposed to be effective in confining the vampire." Montague Summers in *The Vampire in Europe*, notes cases where villagers would fumigate themselves in the smoke of the cremated corpse of an alleged vampire; the smoke would somehow provide immunity against whatever threat was being posed. The practice of fumigating, as well as drinking the ashes, also occurred in New England. There is a touch of irony here, when one considers that many of the so-called vampires of New England were victims of pulmonary tuberculosis, a disease of the lungs. But no doubt the association of smoke with protection is rooted in the fact that smoke of various kinds (incense, for example) was used for ritual and religious purposes.

The only other significant male character who does not smoke is Renfield. Somewhat of an anomaly, he was in all likelihood a smoker back in the days when he frequented the Windham, a gentleman's club in London where, as he tells Arthur, he had known his father. Renfield obviously moved in upper-class circles during his saner days and was most likely a cigar-smoker. But now he is in a lunatic asylum, and one assumes that it is not Seward's policy to let his pet inmate have access to smoking materials, though he doesn't hesitate giving him doses of a narcotic. Presumably, the absence of smoking material is for security reasons (nothing to do with health, as the good doctor smokes). Presumably, Renfield's mental deterioration which makes him susceptible to vampiric influence, befits his new status as a non-smoker.

The vampire hunters -- Jonathan Harker, John Seward, Arthur Holmwood, Quincey Morris and Abraham Van Helsing -- are all smokers. Let's start with Harker. One assumes he carried a supply of cigars or cigarettes with him to Transylvania, and no doubt they came in handy, to relieve pressure after some of those anxiety-producing events in the Castle. But one has to wonder whether he managed to escape with his "smokes" intact. He had not expected to stay for so long, so it is quite likely that he ran out of them well before his escape. If this is the case, then little wonder that he shows up at the train station in Klausenburg in such a state of nervous agitation. Maybe his problem was acute withdrawal pangs rather than brain fever!

Dr Seward smokes regularly, both cigars and cigarettes. Today in the context of the late twentieth-century's powerful anti-smoking lobbies, we would hardly expect a medical doctor to be among the ranks of the nicotine addicts. But this is Dr Seward. Not only is he addicted to smoking, but he has obviously dabbled in chloral hydrate, a powerful and dangerous narcotic used as a sedative, and expresses concern that it might grow into a habit.

Van Helsing clearly does not want Seward smoking around Lucy. He sends the doctor out of the sickroom, stating "we will send him away to smoke the cigarette in the garden whiles you and I have a little talk all to ourselves" (187). Thus he is able to get rid of him so that the professor can converse with his new patient in private without Seward standing by and gazing at her "heaving bosom". Of course, it would not have been appropriate for Seward to have his cigarette in Lucy's room, not so much out of any concern for her health but for reasons of social propriety.

Seward, by the way, is not the only medical practitioner in *Dracula* who smokes. In addition to Van Helsing, of course, so does Patrick Hennessey, Seward's second-in-command at the asylum. Stoker's doctors were obviously not influenced by the warnings of a minority of physicians during the 1890s about the potential risks of tobacco. For example, in 1895, a Dr R V Pierce warned that "Tobacco, when its use becomes habitual and excessive, gives rise to the most unpleasant and dangerous pathological conditions" and advised doctors that their patients under treatment should give it up (see Web site www.trail.com/~coco/index.html).

Quincey Morris is a smoker of a different stripe. He chews tobacco, the only character in the novel to do so. But he does so, only when he is in a situation where lighting up is not appropriate. When the hunters are on a stake-out near the Westenra crypt and do not wish to be seen in the darkness, Quincey reverts quite handily to the habit of chewing. According to Kiernan's *Tobacco: A History*, chewing was "unquestionably the crudest mode of taking tobacco -- an aberration" (56). Further, he notes that the only country where chewing became and long remained the favourite mode of nicotine absorption was the United States (57).

While this little act on the part of Quincey may be seen as part of Stoker's tribute to the rugged individualism of Walt Whitman's America, it also indicates a degree of separation of the American from

the rest of the vampire hunters. Quincey is not quite up to snuff (if you'll pardon the pun). Leatherdale suggests that Quincey "embodies Victorian Britain's condescending view of the raw-edged but genuine American" (*Novel & Legend* 129-30). But I think it goes further than that. For example, Quincey has no part to play in the narrative process of the text (just one short letter); he often slips into slang (the linguistic equivalent of chewing tobacco). When blood donations are being given to Lucy, he is the last in the pecking order, behind Arthur, Seward and Van Helsing. And more significantly, his is the only blood that does not provide temporary relief for Lucy. In spite of assumptions to the contrary, Dracula does not attack Lucy after Quincey's donation. That means that he alone is not represented in the Great Blood Drive that feeds Dracula and eventually finds its way in to Mina. Thus it is somewhat ironic that Mina's baby is named Quincey. Again, consider Quincey's role (or lack of it) at the Great Phallic Moment -- the staking of Lucy: Van Helsing provides the sermon, Arthur gets to drive the stake, Seward gets to record it for posterity. But Quincey? He watches in silence and is sent out of the tomb before the beheading and garlic stuffing takes place. And of course, the tobacco-chewing colonial is the only one of the vampire hunters who loses his life: the expendable American who dies for the cause of reasserting Britain's supremacy.

The "good, brave men" of *Dracula* are all smokers. But not the women. Smoking "drew a dividing line between masculine and feminine" (Kiernan 79) and was thus a badge of masculinity. Henry Davenport Northrop admonished in 1893 that "A gentleman in meeting a lady acquaintance should remove his cigar from his mouth and hold it down by his side" (Web site). One of the reasons gentlemen congregated in all-male clubs was so that they could puff to their heart's (and lung's) content without offending the gentler sex. Throughout *Dracula*, the men rarely smoke in the presence of the ladies; Lucy's sick-room, as we have seen, is kept smoke-free; Mina is in bed when the men meet to make their plans. There is one interesting exception -- Thomas Bilder the zoo-keeper, who smokes a pipe in the presence of his wife (possibly a sign of class consciousness here?).

At 10pm on October 2, Mina records this in her Journal: "After dinner they sent me to bed, and all went off to smoke together, as they said, but I knew that they wanted to tell each other of what had occurred to each during the day" (358). Here, the social custom is used as a weapon to reinforce her exclusion. Later that same night, Count Dracula baptizes Mina with his vampire blood. One only wonders how much second-hand smoke Mina has to put up with once she is taken into the Inner Circle of Hunters. Even though she had shown some irritation at her earlier exclusion (referring to it as "A bitter pill for me to swallow"), she was quite prepared to acquiesce. At no time does she ever express a desire to smoke.

In this respect she is quite different from the New Woman, whom she playfully dismisses in her Journal entry of August 10. "By 1893, a new female heroine had emerged in the popular literary imagination.... Flaunting convention, the New Woman drinks, smokes, and leads a healthy athletic life" (Chadwick 235). Female smokers appear in such works as Vernon Lee's "Lady Tal", Kate Chopin's "An Egyptian Cigarette", and Mary Ward's *Marcella*. Karl Beckson, in *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History*, notes that in both art and life, the New Woman insisted on alternatives to traditional roles: "smoking in public, riding bicycles without escorts ... was not the result of mere whim or self-indulgence but of principle" (129). A contemporary commentary reads: "Shall a lady smoke? It would be my firm conviction that every lady who wishes to smoke does smoke; and yet for some people, this still remains a question" (qtd in Gardiner 10). The phrase "some people" obviously includes Bram Stoker.

Smoking plugs in to the motifs of both hunting and male bonding. Kiernan notes that "Smoking together ... could go half-way towards turning men into friends; the curling wreaths of smoke above a pair of heads might seem allegorical of an intertwining of thought and feeling" (117). Smoking is clearly associated with action, or at least with making plans to take action. In this respect, it is interesting that both cigars and cigarettes found their way to England as the result of wars: the cigar came from Spain during the Peninsular Wars of the early nineteenth century, while the cigarette was an import from the Crimean War.

Collectively, this band of men not only smoke together but share in numerous unethical, even illegal, activities. Harker, for example, tries to get Dracula's agent at Piccadilly to contravene his client's confidentiality and calls him a prig. Notice who comes up with the suggestion "We shall break in if need be" (300). Arthur is forced to remind him of the legal ramifications: "the Incorporated Law Society might tell you that you should have known better" (307). Harker not only participates in the charade, but records it with relish. Although he pays lip service to the idea that protection of the law "is even a criminal's

right” (45), he has no concern for Dracula’s rights. In his mind, there is one law for Englishmen and another for Transylvanian Counts.

The other smokers do not fare much better. Consider that paragon of medical practice, Dr. John Seward. He is not averse to unethical actions when they suit his purposes. He avoids a coroner's inquest into Mrs. Westenra’s death (153); participates in the desecration of Lucy’s tomb, even as he acknowledges “the perils of the law which we were incurring in our unhallowed work” (204); and falsifies Renfield’s death certificate, listing the cause as a “misadventure in falling out of bed” (298). Van Helsing also has a Machiavellian streak: he sneaks around the graveyard “keeping out of official observation” (16:218); invades Dracula’s private rooms; leads the others in a break and entry; orders the desecration of a body (four bodies, if we count the three vampire women in the Castle). He scoops up Dracula’s money, and leads a lynch mob to Dracula’s castle. Under his direction, the vampire hunters become masters of concealment. Jennifer Wicke notes that they manage to keep any notice of vampirism out of the papers (475), ironic in a text so set on recording the truth. Van Helsing is himself a veritable Keeper of Secrets. For quite a while he does not share his suspicions about Lucy’s condition with Seward who is, after all, the resident physician. He also keeps information about the transfusions from Arthur. But most serious of all is how he excludes Mina from knowledge which affects her. In spite of Seward’s assurances that “We need have no secrets amongst us we can surely be stronger than if some of us were in the dark” (227), Van Helsing’s smoke-and-mirrors decision to keep Mina “in the dark” almost costs her her life --and her immortal soul. The members of the Smoking Brigade have much to answer for.

One of the great moments of action in the novel occurs when the men invade Dracula’s residence in Piccadilly. It is October 3, the day after Dracula baptized Mina with his vampire blood. At Piccadilly for this occasion are Harker, Seward, Arthur, Quincey and Van Helsing. Mina, of course, is home in the safety of Seward’s asylum. As they enter the house, which they have broken into illegally, Arthur who is smoking a cigar, has the nerve to exclaim, “The place smells so vilely.” This is interesting in light of some of the more familiar readings of Stoker’s text. Here we have the blue-blooded Englishman, smoking the status symbol of the aristocracy, fumigating the residence of the creature who has invaded England, who has come from Eastern Europe in the form of the threat of deracination and reverse colonization. Also worth noting is that Arthur, as the husband-to-be of Lucy, the same Arthur who drove the wooden stake in to his fiancée, enters Dracula’s residence boldly with a cigar dangling from his mouth! It does not take much of a stretch of the imagination to link the novel’s smokers to the novel’s sexual underpinnings. In a text replete with references to wooden stakes, knives and surgical tools, it is hardly surprising to find a few cigars!

There is, thankfully, no place for women, lunatics and vampires in the smoking rooms of *Dracula*.

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